

Lack of Need Report
November 12, 2009

At its June 11, 2009 meeting, the Board of Directors of M.S.A.D. No. 75 voted to close the West Harpswell School pursuant to 20-A MRSA Section 4102 as amended by Public Law 2007 Chapter 59920-A (4102) because the school is unnecessary and unprofitable to maintain, and to direct the Superintendent of Schools to file with the Commissioner of Education the report referenced in 20-A M.R.S.A 4102(3). The Board of Directors voted to close the school effective the end of the 2009-2010 school year. The Board intends to offer the school and property to the Town of Harpswell at no cost.

Enrollment

Over the past several years, student enrollment has decreased significantly at the two elementary schools in Harpswell. In 2002 the number of Harpswell elementary students K-5 reported on the Oct 1 Census numbered 277. In October of 2008 that number was 185. Enrollment projections provided by Planning Decisions in an analysis dated March 2009 sees a continued decline of total Harpswell students through 2018-19. (See attachment.). Enrollment projections for the next 5 years (2010-2015) predict between 24 and 27 fewer students between the two schools. This year the West Harpswell School begins the year with 74 students and the Harpswell Islands School with 97.

M.S.A.D. No. 75 offers parents in the District the opportunity to select elementary schools from outside their catchment area, providing there is room and the parents can transport the student. Please see the internal migration report included with this report. It describes as of 6/3/09 how parents have made these decisions. For these purposes 30 students who could be attending school in Harpswell were attending school elsewhere in the District. Two students from other towns were attending at Harpswell Islands School.

Parents also choose to send their children to private school or to home-school them. I have attached the 2008-2009 documentation for that as well. These factors do not detract from the fact that enrollments have decreased significantly, and that the coming together of the two elementary schools in Harpswell would provide an elementary school for the town of comparable population to the elementary schools in Bowdoin and Bowdoinham.

The decrease in enrollments in Harpswell is due to three factors. High real-estate prices in Harpswell discourage young families of moderate income from considering Harpswell as a place of residence. The population demographic state-wide is in decline. The closing of the Brunswick Naval Air Station is removing both Navy and civilian employment opportunities from the area. It also reflects the school district's decline in enrollment. In 2002 the October census for M.S.A.D. No. 75 saw a total of 3,426 students. In October of 2008 total enrollment was 2,832, a drop of 594 students District-wide.

Physical Capacity

The Harpswell Islands School has the physical capacity to provide for both populations. As reported in meetings to assess whether this combination was possible, we provided school capacity data. (Please see attachment). The Harpswell Islands School has the capacity for an enrollment of approximately 300 students. The West Harpswell School for 175. The Harpswell Islands School added a wing in 1996 (when its population was 228) to better meet its needs. Again, in October of 2008 West Harpswell and Harpswell Islands enrollments, when combined, were 185 students. The combined enrollment of the two Harpswell Schools in October 2009 is 171, an enrollment decline of about 8%.

Access to Resources

The District strives to ensure that all students have equitable access to resources for learning; in part, this is calculated through ratios of staff per student and access through weekly schedules. The changes in both Harpswell school enrollments have made providing these services and supports to its elementary schools less equitable. Each year as student enrollments decline, adjustments result either in greater inequities in student-staff ratios or reductions in the weekly personnel schedules through which students have access to services. Each year grade level configurations and combinations have changed and adapted to meet student needs. And each year, as enrollments decreased, these adaptations have become more difficult. Teachers either teach combination grades or are the only teacher for a grade. There are no options for alternative placements. Teachers teach without the benefit of grade level colleagues. Students experience a limited number of possible teacher/student interactions. Specials teachers and guidance and social work support personnel are only in the buildings a day or two a week, limiting student access when needed.

Continued Programming/Positive Impacts

With the closing of the school the West Harpswell School students will continue receive programs in reading, writing, math, social studies, science, health, physical education, art, and music (instrumental and general). Educational services in special education guidance, social work, health, technology and library will also continue. These will be provided by having the West Harpswell students attend the Harpswell Islands School. Teachers and support staff, currently at the West Harpswell School, will, where appropriate, move with the children to the Harpswell Islands School, as will educational materials and supplies.

Closing the West Harpswell School will not change the classroom curriculum (reading, writing, math, social studies, science, and health). Art, music and physical education are apportioned on a by-classroom basis; this will not change regardless of the setting. Throughout the District all elementary students receive the same type and amount of art, music and physical education instruction.

However, there are several services that will be positively impacted by the closing of the West Harpswell School. In M.S.A.D. No. 75 several programs and services are apportioned by school student ratio rather than by classroom assignments. Combining student populations will result in greater opportunity for access throughout the school

week to Literacy Intervention Support, Title 1 programs, guidance and social work services, technology support, and library and media services.

Because human resources are now split between the two schools and , resulting in limited weekly access to guidance, technology, Title 1, literacy teachers and social work support services, the presence of these resources will be more accessible to students and teachers as they spend a greater amount of time in the one building. Similarly, more options for class configuration and student class placement will be available. With greater student numbers come greater resources and the ability of the school district to apply those resources to meet student needs. Some examples include more varied options to group and regroup for instruction, more variety in cooperative learning groups, larger band and choral ensembles, and increased opportunities for socialization

Response to Intervention

The District has a responsibility under the law to implement a Response to Intervention methodology to better meet the needs of all students and to fulfill the requirements of No Child Left Behind (20-A M.R.S.A Chapter 207-A 4710). A fundamental premise of RTI is the collaboration of teachers in the diagnosis and prescription of needed instructional practices. Organizational structures that allow for scheduled time for teachers to meet together to look at assessment data and explore instructional strategies are restricted in small schools where there are few opportunities for students to be with other teachers with different skill sets to free classroom teachers to meet.

Response to Intervention system development also requires careful orchestration of support services to supplement the core instruction where needed. RTI is based on a collaborative team approach whereby differentiation of instruction can occur and students who need additional support receive it in a timely manner. The interventions necessary for students in need depend in part on access to human resources which are not necessarily available when needed in schools with part-time personnel. Closing the West Harpswell School and transferring students to the Harpswell Islands School provides the necessary critical mass of human resources and students to implement the RTI model – more than one teacher per grade, greater and more flexible opportunities to schedule teacher collaboration time, greater access to intervention resources during the week, and a wider range of expertise to apply toward improved learning.

Transportation

It is calculated that with some necessary changes in bus routes, transportation time for some West Harpswell students will increase, while for others the transportation time will remain the same or possibly decrease. In terms of student riding time, the maximum riding time could increase by as much as 20 minutes. However, student riding time will remain within the range of M.S.A.D. No. 75 elementary buses. Additional total miles traveled by buses is minimal due to the fact that all elementary buses return to the bus garage in Topsham after their runs, and the route to the Harpswell Islands School from South Harpswell is, for the most part, in the direction of the bus garage and would be traveled regardless of the school closing.

Cost Savings

While it is more educationally effective to bring the students and teachers together in one building, it is also more cost effective to close the West Harpswell School. The Harpswell Island School has the capacity to house the children of the West Harpswell School at almost no additional cost. Custodial, secretarial, food service and nursing staff will not have to be duplicated. Energy and maintenance costs for West Harpswell can be eliminated. Travel time for itinerant district personnel can be reduced. The district has provided the attached analysis of cost savings from closing the school. There are no outstanding financial obligations or debt service associated with the West Harpswell School.

While these cost savings are those that would be realized based on the FY '09 audit, it is understood that these savings and other cost avoidance extend into the future, such as future ongoing building and grounds maintenance and anticipated eventual capital needs including but not limited to roof replacement, well and septic upgrades, HVAC upgrades, and window replacements